

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Service Delivery Policy and Challenge
Group
10 March 2016
Item No. 10

REPORT AUTHOR: HEAD OF OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: COMPLAINTS – DRIVING AND PARKING OF SERVICE VEHICLES

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Background Papers:

Audit and Standards Committee Meeting Minutes December 2015

Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL		FINANCIAL	
HUMAN RESOURCES		EQUALITY IMPACT	
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	
CORPORATE RISK	Known	OTHER (please specify)	
	New	CORE BRIEF	

Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.

PURPOSE:

To provide Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group with information on the findings of investigations into external complaints received about the driving and parking of Service vehicles.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group consider the report provided.

1. Background

A report on Customer Complaints received during 2014-15 and 2015-16 was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee Meeting in December 2015. This report included information on the number of complaints received regarding

the driving and parking of Service vehicles (with a breakdown of those upheld and not upheld).

Concern was expressed about the number of upheld complaints relating to the driving and parking of service vehicles and the Committee resolved that a report on complaints received in relation to driving and parking of services vehicles be referred to the appropriate Policy and Challenge Group.

2 Investigation of Complaints

When a Customer Complaint is received, this is brought to the attention of the relevant functional head who will allocate a manager to investigate the complaint aiming to respond to the complaint with the findings of the investigation within 10 working days. This can be a challenging timeframe to meet.

The majority of operational fire appliances are fitted with CCTV cameras, which gives the Service an enhanced level of evidence to support the investigation of complaints. However, non-operational vehicles and some operational vehicles do not have CCTV systems fitted. Where CCTV footage is available, the Service Driving Instructors view the footage and provide the investigator a report giving their professional opinion on the standard of driving. Where CCTV footage is unavailable it is often more difficult for the investigating officer to determine whether or not a complaint should be upheld.

Where there is serious concern over the standard of driving, then if considered appropriate, a driver may be suspended from driving duties pending the investigation outcome. Where investigation finds that the standard of driving appears to be below the required level, then appropriate management action will be considered including provision of additional training and application of performance or conduct policies.

3 Analysis of Complaints

The December report to Audit and Standards Committee provided information set out in Table 1. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Table 1

Complaints Regarding Driving of Service vehicle (including parking).				
Year	Complaints Received	Upheld	Not Upheld	Complainant(s) Satisfied?
2014/15	10	2	8	Yes
2015/16 to 31 October 2015	5	4	1 (inconclusive)	Yes

Further analysis of the total of 15 complaints has been carried out to categorise the nature of complaints investigated. This is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Nature of complaint	Upheld	Not Upheld
Inappropriate non-operational parking of Service vehicles (e.g. causing obstruction)	1	2
Driving causing member of public driver to take evasive action to avoid a collision (4 of 5 on blue lights)	2	3 (including 1 inconclusive – no CCTV evidence)
Poor Blue Light Driving standards (e.g. excessive speed, intimidating use of bull horn)	0	2
Inappropriate normal road use driving (eating/drinking whilst driving)	1	0
Unnecessary use of sirens disturbing local residents	2	2

A brief summary of the findings on complaints which were upheld or inconclusive is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Nature of complaint	
Inappropriate non-operational parking of Service vehicles (e.g. causing obstruction)	Fire appliance parked partially on a pathway and double yellow lines whilst carrying out non-emergency activity. Officer in charge and driver received reprimand on conduct with written note for file.
Blue Light Driving causing Member of Public driver to take evasive action to avoid a collision	Fire appliance on blue lights carried out an overtaking manoeuvre. Oncoming car did not respond to the presence of the fire appliance and had to drive tight against the kerb to avoid fire appliance. Clipped kerb resulting in damage to vehicle. Service driver should have anticipated and catered for lack of reaction from other road users. FRS met cost of repair. FRS driver provided with feedback and additional instruction.
	Complainant stated appliance (not on blue lights) overtook him whilst he was cycling causing oncoming vehicle to stop to avoid collision. No CCTV available, investigation inconclusive – driver reminded of standards expected.
	Investigation found that blue light driving was assertive, but not reckless. The situation arose as a result of a very late reaction by a member of the public to the presence of the

	fire appliance. Service driver should have anticipated and catered for lack of reaction from other road users. FRS driver provided with feedback and additional instruction.
Inappropriate normal road use driving (eating/drinking whilst driving)	Complainant overtaken by Service van whose driver was observed eating and drinking whilst driving. Driver received reprimand on conduct with written note for file and additional driver training provided.
Unnecessary use of sirens disturbing local residents	2 complaints received within 3 weeks of each other over unnecessary use of sirens when responding from Kempston station. Sample review of CCTV found that on 1 occasion (out of 6 sampled) sirens had been used unnecessarily. Driver reprimanded and all station personnel reminded of required standard and need to show consideration.

4 Blue Light Driving Standards

The following paragraphs highlight relevant Service standards/expectations for blue light driving.

Section 219 of the Highway Code provides the following guidance for other drivers in relation to emergency vehicles:

Emergency and Incident Support vehicles.

You should look and listen for ambulances, fire engines, police, doctors or other emergency vehicles using flashing blue, red or green lights and sirens or flashing headlights, or Highways Agency Traffic Officer and Incident Support vehicles using flashing amber lights. When one approaches do not panic. Consider the route of such a vehicle and take appropriate action to let it pass, while complying with all traffic signs. If necessary, pull to the side of the road and stop, but try to avoid stopping before the brow of a hill, a bend or narrow section of road. Do not endanger yourself, other road users or pedestrians and avoid mounting the kerb. Do not brake harshly on approach to a junction or roundabout, as a following vehicle may not have the same view as you.

Service fire appliance drivers are taught that they may position their vehicle overtly in order to 'encourage' a reaction from oncoming vehicles, however if the reaction has not been achieved, then care must be taken to avoid forcing a reaction from other road users or making a line of three vehicles abreast.

Use of sirens

The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 prohibit the use of sirens between 23.30 hours and 07.00 hours. However, when responding to incidents emergency service vehicles are exempt from this requirement where the use of sirens is necessary or desirable to warn other road users of their presence.

Our response drivers are provided with training on when it is and is not appropriate to use warning sirens. For example, sirens must always be used when proceeding through a red traffic light. Our expectation is that drivers show consideration to local residents and exercise care and diligence in the use of warning sirens, only using them where necessary for the safety of themselves and other road users.

**SERVICE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER IAN EVANS
HEAD OF OPERATIONS**